

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

Making It Work

Department of Education

A Student's Story

Keys to Success

Looking at Jon Fiala at work today at Wal-Mart, you might not be aware of all that he accomplished and learned on his way to this job. Jon has been employed at the Wal-Mart in Columbus since July 2005 and currently has responsibilities for unloading trucks at the store. He is very happy with this job and is not likely to look elsewhere for employment in the near future. So, what did it take for him to get to this point?

A critical key to Jon's success relates to the transition planning that was done during his high school years at David City Aquinas. Jon has a learning disability in written language and a speech/language impairment. He has difficulties staying focused and on track with tasks given to him. During high school, Jon was unsure of his skills and rather shy. These factors made it especially important that Jon and his family receive help in planning for his future.

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Jon Fiala

Focus on Employment:

Happenings in Transition

How can high school students learn what it takes to be successful in employment? This is an important question that staff working in the Vocational Rehabilitation (Voc Rehab) Transition Program address every day. They recognize the importance of providing students with hands-on experiences and exposure to the world of work.

In order to provide these experiences and exposure, Voc Rehab works in cooperation with schools to provide a variety of activities. Tours of businesses, job fairs, and presentations by employers are examples of activities that play an important role in assisting students in preparation for life after high school.

Jack Shepard, State Transition Coordinator for Voc Rehab, notes that, "It is activities such as these that create a reality and sense of possibilities for participating students. Instead of discussing jobs and careers in the classroom, it gives them an opportunity to see what's possible and offers an opportunity to talk with employers. When employers tell students what they are looking for in an employee and what it takes to be successful, it has an impact that really can't be duplicated in the classroom." Following are highlights of three different types of transition activities provided for high school students by Voc Rehab offices across the state.

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Happenings in Transition

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Transitions Career Experience Day Columbus

The Columbus Vocational Rehabilitation office works

in partnership with Central Community College, Workforce Development, and Educational Service Unit #7 to provide exposure to a variety of occupations for area students. The partnership provides activities focused around the six Career Cluster areas identified in the

Nebraska Career Education model. This year's focus was on the industrial, manufacturing, and engineering career cluster. The group plans to continue activities on an ongoing basis to expose students to as many occupational areas as possible during their high school years.

The Transitions Career Experience Day was held in Columbus in February, providing activities for persons representing sixteen area schools. Those attending included over 100 students in grades 9 through 12 and faculty members from the participating schools.

The morning was spent on the Columbus campus of Central Community College, where students listened to a presentation by the college's Special Populations Coordinator. Here they heard important information regarding the differences between high school and college level supports. Students then attended breakout sessions with college instructors focusing on the occupational areas of: Mechatronics, Robotics and Welding, Automotive, Machine Tool, Drafting, and Industrial Technology. This gave them a good glimpse into college life and the various occupations.

In the afternoon, six industrial companies in Columbus provided tours for the students. Each school chose two sites to tour. This was very well-received, with one student commenting, "The tours of the factories were awesome...I live in Columbus and had no idea the world-wide manufacturing that goes on right here in Columbus!" Another student summed it up by saying, "This was truly an eye-opening, learning experience." That is proof enough that the day was a success!



Spring Transition Tours Grand Island, Hastings, and Kearney

The Vocational Rehabilitation Transition Program in Grand Island, Hastings, and Kearney recently completed their ninth year of offering Transition Tours for area students. Each semester, tours of approximately thirty local businesses (ten sites in each community) are arranged for students from as many as thirteen area schools.

In addition to visiting each company's facility, the tours provide students with the opportunity to learn about the business, the types of positions available, working conditions, and employer expectations. "We ask the company representatives to talk about all the positions in their company, what makes a good employee, and what they are looking for in potential employees," Grand Island Placement Specialist, Ernie Thayer, said about the tours.

An important part of the tour consists of watching the workers perform the tasks required in their jobs. Students are told how the employees were trained and what background they need to perform the essential functions of their job. Employers describe how workers are selected for the various positions based upon education, aptitude, and interest.





This career exploration activity is designed for sophomores, juniors, and seniors. By learning about the requirements for different occupations, students can take classes while still in high school that could help them with future employment in their area of interest. Some students participating in the tours plan to begin working right after high school, while others plan to pursue additional education after graduation.

Regardless of their plans, the students find that the tours provide valuable information to assist them in their preparation for life after high school.

School to Work Job Fair Omaha

The Vocational Rehabilitation Transition Program in Omaha recently held their first School to Work Job Fair for area high school juniors and seniors. The Job Fair provided transition students the opportunity to meet job recruiters, human resource specialists, and hiring managers from a variety of employers and agencies.

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A Student's Story

Keys to Success... continued

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During high school, Jon began receiving services provided by Vocational Rehabilitation (Voc Rehab). These services included career planning, assessments, independent living evaluations, and assistance with post-secondary planning. This assessment and planning process helped Jon to identify jobs that would be a good fit for him and to make a plan for getting there.

The first step in the plan was for Jon to attend the Job Corps program in Denison, Iowa. Job Corps is a no-cost education and vocational training program administered by the U.S. Department of Labor that helps young people ages 16 through 24 get a better job, make more money, and take control of their lives.

Jon's mother, Peg Fiala, notes that the time at Job Corps was an eye-opening experience for him. She reports that he was exposed to many different personalities and people coming from a variety of backgrounds, including many with a troubled past. She says that, while a challenging time that was not always enjoyable for him, Jon gained a lot of maturity and insight into himself and others from this experience.

When Jon returned home to David City after his time with Job Corps, Voc Rehab was again there to help. Voc Rehab Specialists Angie Gangwish and Marlene Konsel worked with him on employment success skills, job seeking and retention skills, and job placement. They looked at employment opportunities in the area and Marlene assisted Jon in completing job applications.

She helped him prepare for his interview with Wal-Mart and attended the interview with him.

When Jon was hired in a stocking position at Wal-Mart in July 2005, Voc Rehab helped him get the clothing he needed for the position and provided a job coach to help him adjust to the work environment, his co-workers, and his assigned tasks. The job coach reported that Jon caught on to his tasks very quickly and did a great job. Once the job coaching was completed, Marlene helped Jon identify people in the workplace that he could go to for help, if needed. This made work very comfortable for Jon.

Another key to Jon's success was getting a driver's license. He received this while at Job Corps, but did not have a lot of confidence or experience in driving. After returning home, he began practicing with his mom and, in no time, was driving to work every day and now owns his own vehicle. Add one more accomplishment to his list!

Peg Fiala advises other parents that it is important to let your children know that you love them and will always be there to support them. This must have worked for Jon, as Voc Rehab Specialist Angie Gangwish notes that she enjoys working with him and that he has "...a wonderful personality. He is hard working and dedicated to his job." What better proof that Jon has figured out the keys to success?

For more information regarding Job Corps, call (800) 733-5627 or visit their website at <http://jobcorps.dol.gov>.

Happenings in Transition... continued

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Employers participating included those representing fields such as medical facilities, hotels, restaurants, manufacturing, and construction. Agency representation included Vocational Rehabilitation, Education Quest, Job Corps, and the Assistive Technology Partnership.

At the Job Fair, students were able to ask questions regarding employment and to practice their job seeking skills by interacting with employers. The Fair also provided employers a way to connect with a large number of job seekers, since over one hundred students, teachers, and parents were in attendance for the day.

Employers indicated they were very impressed with the students and some even made contact after the Job Fair to inquire about hiring students they met that day. Many employers made it clear that they wish to attend future Job Fairs. Feedback from teachers and students was equally positive.

Jan Nesmith from Yates Alternative High School stated, "We had a fantastic time at the work fair. The students kept talking about their experiences all the way back to

school!! You thank us? We thank YOU for providing this opportunity to our kids. YOU ROCK!" Need we say more?

For More Information:

Contact the State Vocational Rehabilitation Office in Lincoln at **1-402-471-3644** or toll free at **1-877-637-3422**.

You may obtain information on the Voc Rehab Service Office in your area by calling these numbers or accessing the Service Office listing on the web at: <http://www.vocrehab.state.ne.us/vr/office.html>

About this Publication

This publication, produced by Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation, is intended for students with disabilities and their families. The next issue, Volume #24, is scheduled for distribution in September, 2007.

Please contact us if you:

- Would like additional copies of this publication.
- Have questions or would like more details about any of the information contained in this issue.
- Have a success story you'd like to share with us.
- Have suggestions for topics for future issues.
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Additional Resources

If you have questions or concerns about services from Vocational Rehabilitation or are looking for additional disability resources, contact the Hotline for Disability Services/Client Assistance Program at 1-800-742-7594 or in Lincoln at 402-471-0801 or e-mail victoria.rasmussen@cap.ne.gov

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